



ရခိုင်သဟာယအသင်း(ရန်ကုန်)

မဂ္ဂဇင်း

## EDITOR'S NOTE

### PROMOTING 'BEST BRAINS'

"Rendering service to others without expecting self-interest in return" is the motto of our Association. Since its founding more than forty years ago, a great number of services in the interests of both individuals and community have been rendered. Honouring students who passed matriculation and exams of higher educational institutes and universities with flying colours, honouring members of religious order and laymen alike who are awarded titles or awards for exceptional skills or contributions in a particular area, giving sizable financial assistance to students studying in higher educational institutions, to name a few.

What is our aim for such work? To promote 'best brains'. Taking into account that human resource is the best resource of all, we render helping hand in the promotion of such personalities. In fact, it is one of our aims and objects.

To turn the pages, rendering financial assistance to university students started in 1981. It has been expanded and extended year after year to cover thirty eight students in this academic year of 2001 - 2002. Our contribution to each student is comparatively small amounting to Kyats 1000 to ordinary student and Kyats 1500 to scholarship student respectively. However, to raise the figure is under consideration because of higher prices for goods and services. Since our financial reserve is rather limited, we cannot render all-out support to our cherished students. But our expectations are great: to help promote 'best brains'.

The other side of the coin in our noble deed is the donors and well-wishers. We hopefully expect their financial contributions in our endeavour to support the sons and daughters of the soil, thus promoting "the best brains".



## The Two Epigraphs

At the present state of our knowledge we know of two inscriptions, the characters of which resemble a pre - Christ epoch Brahmi. Both the inscriptions are written in Pali language, of these two, the earlier seems to be the Fat Monk Image inscription<sup>1</sup> belonging to c. 2<sup>nd</sup> - 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. As the inscription is not a dated one, we have to fall back upon the paleography of the record. Discovered in the ruins of an old brick pagoda lying about three miles to the east of old Waythali City, it contains a one - line inscription and is presently preserved at the Sittway Cultural Museum.

Of a somewhat later date is the inscription<sup>2</sup> discovered near the village of Taungpaukkri. The material, on which the inscription is engraved, is the natural rock known as Selagiri, lying about two miles from Taungpaukkri. On the basis of paleography it may be dated sometime between 2<sup>nd</sup> - century B.C. and 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. The inscription<sup>3</sup>, fragmentary in nature, contained a legible portion of five lines of writing, out of about twenty - five lines, the rest being damaged.



With the exception of a few alphabet and medial signs<sup>4</sup>, these two epigraphs then mark the advent of script in Arakan(Rakhine). The date suggested of the two inscriptions on the basis of paleography is not in conflict with that of the epigraphs found in the adjoining regions of India. One can cite the presence of similar script in a record recovered from the northern part of Bengal<sup>5</sup> (in the district of Bogra, now in Bangladesh.)

## Certain Latest Information

With the discovery and decipherment of a number of new epigraphically materials, we now know of certain latest information, which can be termed as an advancement of our knowledge in respect of the following:

- (i) The date<sup>6</sup> of the earliest inscription from Arakan(Rakhine) is c. 2<sup>nd</sup> - 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.
- (ii) Inscriptions of a later date found in Arakan(Rakhine) were mostly written in Sanskrit<sup>7</sup>, but the two mentioned above are written in Pali.
- (iii) The finds of two inscriptions datable to about c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. show that their scripts bear affinity with

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By U Sandamuni(Mijjhima)

Northern Indian or North - Eastern variety of Brahmi, rather than the Southern one.

- (iv) However, in a few later inscriptions<sup>8</sup> the traits of South Indian scripts are discernible.
- (v) There are instances of scripts<sup>9</sup> where we can trace local development in regard to their formation. Again there are a few words in the inscriptions which can definitely be termed as Arakanese(Rakhine)<sup>10</sup>.
- (vi) The use of imprecatory verses<sup>11</sup> found in a few inscriptions may be compared with similar writings in Indian land - grant inscriptions.

## Making a home away from home

In studying the early epigraphs of  
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Arakan(Rakhine) one is inclined to find a close similarity with the ones discovered in India. It merely indicates that the people of these two contiguous regions had come into contact with each other since a very early time. If the Arakanese(Rakhine) chronicles are to be believed the chief players in this drama of making a home away from home are not only the princes of Indian royal families and Buddhist missionaries but also traders who seemed to have before their eyes only those things which were simply materialistic. However, so far as epigraphically materials are concerned, this similarity can be traced in almost all the modes with which an inscription is brought out namely, (i) the script itself (ii) the alphabet both vowels and consonants as well as the medial sings, (iii) language for writing (iv) theme of writing, which is, however, predominately, Buddhistic (v) style of writing, e.g. to be noted in the imprecatory verses and last, but not the least, (vi) materials on which the writing is engraved.

However, a significant deviation happens to be the almost total omission of any reckoning, the reason for which cannot be easily ascertained. It may be that the usage of regular feature among the Arakanese Buddhists. As a corollary, excepting a few cases<sup>12</sup> we hardly get any inscribed reference to numerals in Arakanese(Rakhine) inscriptions. The Indian epigraphs on the other hand, belonging to both early and periods, tend to date the reckoning either in the regnal years of the reigning king or in any one of the popular current eras

### A Major Source

A major source for the study of Arakanese(Rakhine) script and its development is the innumerable number of coins, issued mostly in silver, though a few coins issued in other metals are also known<sup>13</sup>. Paleography of the coin legends indicates that some of these coins seem to have been issued from at least 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Later, different members of different ruling houses continued to issue till about 1784 A.D., when Arakan(Rakhine) ceased to become an independent state.

### The Alphabet used for inscribing

As already stated, we do not have the entire alphabet<sup>14</sup> from both vowels and consonants in the Fat Monk Image inscription and the Taungpaukri rock inscription. The  
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medial sign "au" is conspicuous by its absence. The respective vowels and consonants which cannot be traced in either of the inscriptions are i, i, e, ai, au and ta, tha, da, dha, pha, sa and ha<sup>15</sup>. The remaining alphabet that has been inscribed on these two inscriptions show little difference from Indian alphabet belonging to c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. to c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. of particular interest is the letter "da" engraved on Taungpaukri inscription. It is an angular type similar to the form found in the inscription of Asoka. "Tha" also probably belongs to the same age as that of "da". The letters "ka" and "sa" engraved on the backside of the Fat Monk Image inscription are akin to the ones found in the Mahasthan inscription, Bogra district, Bangladesh. Again "na", "pa" and "ra" of the Fat Monk Image inscription resemble closely to the letters found in the Taungpaukri Fragmentary inscription<sup>16</sup>.

### Buddhist faith in Arakan ( Rakhine )

The theme of the inscriptions that have been discovered in Arakan(Rakhine) does indicate, in most cases, a Buddhistic leaning. But surprisingly one of the pre-Christ epoch inscriptions speaks of the word "jina"<sup>17</sup> implying some sort of Jaina connection on the part of at least the maker or donor of the image. However, according to a lexical definition "jina" means both Buddha and the Vedic god Visnu. Since relation pertaining to Vaisnavism and the god Visnu are to be ascribed not earlier than seventh century A.D.<sup>18</sup>, it would be better to identify "jina" with Buddha. In that case the "saccakaparibbajaka" Fat Monk, whose image bears the present inscription might have been one of the early converts in the Buddhist faith in Arakan(Rakhine), the event probably taking place not later than 2<sup>nd</sup> - 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.<sup>19</sup>.

### The Buddha's sojourn to Arakna ( Rakhine )

The Taungpaukri inscription, belonging to the pre-Christian epoch, significantly refers to the word "Bhikkhu - Samgha" implying thereby the monastic order of the Buddhists of Arakan(Rakhine). The monastery of the Bhikkhus happened probably to be situated close to the Gacchabhanadi<sup>20</sup>, which was the ancient name of the river Kaladan. So this



inscription evidence makes it clear that during the early centuries, either proceeding, probably, the Christian era, Buddhism must have become a popular religions creed in Arakan(Rakhine). If we take into account the numerous chronicles, traditions and anecdotes<sup>21</sup> relating to Buddha's sojourn in Arakan(Rakhine) during his lifetime, it would then appear that Buddhism gained an acceptance in Arakan (Rakhine) during 6<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. itself. But as there is no cogent ground to support this tradition based hypothesis, it would be prudent to infer that the religion had become a dominant creed sometimes during 2<sup>nd</sup> - 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. This inference is quite in consonance with inscription evidence discovered from Taungpaukri, on the road between Selagiri and Mrauk U.

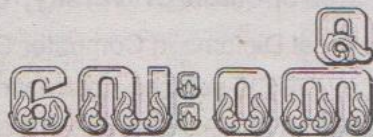
#### The descendants of Candasuriya and their pious dedication

The advent of script in Arakan (Rakhine) synchronizes with the period when the descendants of Candasuriya<sup>22</sup>, the earliest king of the Suriya dynasty, were ruling during the third Dhannavady phase (580 B.C. 327 A.D.). We have seen that the paleography of the two early inscriptions found in Arakan (Rakhine)

indicates a date sometime around 2<sup>nd</sup> - 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. Now, following the chronological arrangement adopted in Arakanese(Rakhine) chronicles, the first Suriya King seemed to have ascended the throne sometime in 580 B.C.<sup>23</sup> By 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. when we have, for the first time, the evidence of script in Arakan(Rakhine), the sixth or seventh king from Candasuriya, namely king Suriyacakka or his son king Suriyanatha might have been ruling over Arakan(Rakhine). Incidentally, the chronicles speak of king Suriyacakka as a contemporary of his famous Indian counterpart, King Dhammasoka<sup>24</sup> who issued numerous edicts throughout India during his reign (c.269-232 B.C.). If it was not during the reign of Suriyacakka, then it was probably during the reign of his son Suriyanatha that we come across the first instance of script in the inscriptions ever discovered in Arakan(Rakhine). So in the early history of Arakan(Rakhine), the third Dhannavady phase will be remembered for at least one innovation; that it gave the Arakanese(Rakhine) the first ever script with which to write down whatever they would think specially about their pious dedication in the name of the great Buddha.

By U Sandamuni(Mijhinna) \*

ရန်ကုန်အခြေစိုက် ရခိုင်အမျိုးသားအားလုံးကို ကိုယ်စားပြု



တေးဂီတအဖွဲ့



“ရခိုင်အမျိုးသားများ ဂုဏ်ယူဖွယ် အဆင့်မီ အနုပညာဝိုင်းတစ်ဝိုင်းအဖြစ် ပေါ်ထွန်းလာစေရေး”  
“ရန်ကုန်မြို့တော်တွင် ရခိုင်အမျိုးသားများနှင့် ပတ်သက်သော ဘာသာရေးအခါကြီးရက်ကြီးများနှင့် လူမှုရေး ပွဲလမ်းသဘင်များတွင် ရိုးရာ နှင့် ခေတ်ပေါ်ရခိုင်အနုပညာရပ်များကို တင်ဆက်ဖျော်ဖြေနိုင်ရေး” အတွက်

စိတ်ပါဝင်စားသူများ နှင့် ဆိုကာရေးတီး ရခိုင်အနုပညာဝါသနာ့သျှင်များ ဆက်သွယ်ကြပါ။

ဆက်သွယ်ရန်-

- ဒေါက်တာကျော်သိန်း၊ နာယက၊ ပါမောက္ခချုပ်(ငြိမ်း)၊ ၅၃၅၃၀၂
- ကိုသန်းမောင်၊ ဥက္ကဋ္ဌ၊ ၀၉ ၅၀၀၅၀၆၆၊ ၅၃၅၆၄၈
- ကိုခင်မောင်သန်း၊ အတွင်းရေးမှူး၊ ၅၄၈၇၉၀၊ ၅၄၉၉၂၅

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# SEKKYAMUNI COPPER IMAGE AND — INSCRIPTIONS ON IT —

BY SAYA SHWE



The King Surya Kula and the queen Seitra Kalyani.

The King Surya Kula was the fourteenth king of the third Dhanyawady. He reigned the country earlier two successive kings than the King Surya Seitra who erased the 609 kawza era. I have not described about this king for he had no speciality. But now we had to full fill this void for we find a speciality of this king.

It was because we have paid homage to a copper image upon which the name of Surya Kula was inscribed with Rakhine alphabets at the back of the pedestal. We would like to recount Brahmi alphabet was also inscribed in front of the pedestal and explain how we found this copper image.

## How the Image was found

It was second in June 2000, when a fisherman from Tharma hamlet, near Thantra village in Mrauk-U Township, casted his net to get fish, but instead he found a copper image. The height of the image is 18 inches and the width of its breast

is 8 inches. In (5.7.2000) the fisherman entrusted and donated this bronze image to the venerable abbot Sakka Pala of Bandoola monastery in Mrauk-U.

## Scholars' descriptions

Some of the local scholars described about the image as follow: -

This image is "sculpted in the posture of Dhamma Sakkra Mudra. Except its visage, so many minute images are covering across the body. On the palm of the left hand eight pointed star is studded. Within the contour of eight pointed star there is a shape of wheel that symbolizes the Dhamma Sakkra. In the middle of the forehead there is a small group of curling hair down with the spiral formation. The image was casted and executed with crafty skill. Measurements of Lord Buddha's body structures were carefully and exactly executed. There is a writing at the front portion of the pedestal is assumed to be "Ye Dhamma....." and by estimation its age will be 2200 years old. It was in third Dhanyawady period. At the back portion of the pedestal there is another writing with Rakhine alphabet. That writing is the transition from Brahmi to Rakhine alphabet. That writing was inscribed on the stone pillar during Wethali Period. The alphabets and style of writings are similar with the writings on copper Lamp and Sula Maha Raja coin.

This image was started to cast and mould since third Dhanyawady period and the label was assumed to be inscribed by the king, Thiri Candra of Wesali period. This image is extraordinary and rare because Dhamma Sakkra Mudra is expressed symbolically. It indicated that Theravada Buddhism prevailed and flourished in Rakhine state since that time.

## U Tun Myint's short accounts

I found the short accounts of image at the back of the photograph recorded by the photographer U Tun Myint.

- The image is made of copper, its height is 18 inches.
- Right hand of the image is dropped over the knee but it does not touch the ground.
- left palm rests on its back and the eight pointed star rests on the palm. At the centre of the

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star there exists a wheel that symbolizes the Dhamma Sakka.

- There are uncountable minute images on its head and across the body. It is very rare and craftily executed. At the centre of the forehead there is spiral mark.
- The names of donors are inscribed as the King Surya Kula and the queen Seitra Kalyani ( from 519 to 555 )

#### Alphabets of the inscription

I was told by a friend that the inscription in the back portion of the pedestal, used the alphabets that indicated the transition from Brahmi to Rakhine. In this paragraph the donor's name was inscribed as Surya Kula. In the inscription, we can find the era 520 in Rakhine alphabets. A line of Brahmi alphabets is inscribed in front of the pedestal also.

By examining the facts mentioned above, the name of the donor the King Surya Kula, who was the fourteenth in line of the successive kings of Third Dhanyawady. The time of the ascension to the throne of this king was from 519 to 555 in Kawza era. It corresponded with the accepted date. But there were two periodic time scales that corresponded with 520 Kawza era. Once in Wethali period when the King Thiri Candra reigned there and second in Le - Mro period when the King Dhanu Rupaw, who built the second Sampawet. The style of hand writing with Rakhine alphabets on the pedestal of this image would not be the inscription of original donor. Someone did it in later period. Most probably it had been done during Wethali period, in which Rakhine alphabets were evolved. ( like that of Man Aung Myin Muni in Zalun. )

If we examine this image from the point of view of iconography its style of execution is neither related with Mrauk - U period nor with Le - Mro as well as Wethali period. It resembles with that of Man Aung Myin Muni of Zalun.

#### By None other than Rakhine Artisans

Its face seems to be smiling. The eyes are looking downwards. Its Posture is elegant and executed with the rule of Buddhist treatise. This treatise was written in Mrauk - U period basing on the rules of moulding the Maha Muni image. The prototype image done by Rakhine can be easily differentiate. The ear lobes of image is drooped down, but they do not touch the image's shoulders. The two arms do not contact with the body. So we remark this image was casted and moulded by none other than Rakhine artisans.

Its posture (mudra) combines with two or three postures. The art of combining various postures is not an easy one. It was extraordinarily and craftily

executed. This image combines with ground touching posture (Bhumiphasa Mudra) and Dhamma Sakkra Mudra. Dhamma Sakkra is symbolically expressed with eight pointed star, that indicates the eight cardinal points or all the directions except above and below. It symbolizes that Dhamma propagates and spreads all around. It also denotes the eight ways to Nirvana. By examining this image we can assume that the donor was deeply rooted in Buddhism and wise enough to foresee the future.

The head and body of the image is covered with uncountable minute images. It reminded the Mandaing stupa in Pharabaw Phara of Mrauk - U. Upon the ten rings of this stupa 103 small images are studded. That seems to refer the Rakhine's tradition. These myriad of minute images are similar to one another. So we should call this image as Mandaing image (the pivotal centre image.)

A group of down hair curling spirally at the centre of the forehead is skillfully depicted. (If it is uncoiled it will be elbow's length.)

#### Buddhism in the third Dhanyawady Period

In brief we can postulate that since that time the Buddhism prevailed and flourished throughout the Rakhine region. In third Dhanyawady period the Buddhism was up to its summit and Rakhine literature with Brahmi alphabets was fully up graded.

Finding of this image and having chance to worship this image sheds light on the Buddhism that flourished in third Dhanyawady and Wethali Kyauk Hlaykha period. And it disproves the notion put forward by some scholars that the Rakhine people of that period preached the Mahayana Buddhism.

The civilisation cannot emerge suddenly. It cultivates through thousands of years. The Buddhist civilisation had done the same. The Buddhism was rooted in Rakhine during the life time of Buddha. Lord Buddha paid a visitation to Rakhine in 123 Maha era.

This time was when Buddha attained 20th monsoon retreats. It was the time when the King Canda Surya of Dhanyawady had ruled there 26 years in 57. B.C. Moreover in 214 Buddhist era (278 B.C), the King Surya Sakka received the Buddhist missionaries who were sent by King Ashoka of Pataliputra in India. In this way, originally Buddhist state was deeply rooted by this Buddhist mission. They preached Theravada Buddhism. From those days on the parents let their sons to novitiate. In other words, the Buddhist civilisation began to take root in Rakhine soil. The Sandar Muni Maha Kyan image was casted and moulded in accordance with the wish of the King Surya Sakka.

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#### **Rare and important evidence**

Now it would be a rare chance to pay homage to a copper image which was casted and moulded by the wish of the King Surya Kula. It proves that Theravada Buddhism prevailed and flourished there since then. Moreover Rakhine literature was conspicuously advanced from that period. It will be the rare and important evidence.

I believe that these hard evidences will disprove the general notions postulated by some scholars that the original religion in Rakhine was Mahayanic Sect and literature and civilisation derived from Bagan.

And in Dr. Pamela Gutma's doctoral thesis stated that the site of Dhanyawady emerged from the water in 1050 A.D. This theory basing on geological process is absolutely absurd. According to her thesis, the Dhanyawady evolved after Wethali and Le - Mro period. It seems to express Dhanyawady as a fable.

#### **Conclusion**

In brief we would like to settle the controver-

sial notions and to put forward the authentic accounts that Rakhine people's predominant religion was Theravada Buddhism, utilication of Kawza era and Rakhine alphabets were derived from Brahmi of northern India and Rakhine alphabets and writings were well spread and flourished since middle of the Wethali period. Period of the emergence of Rakhine alphabets were more earlier than Bagan. It will not be possible as some scholars made assumption that Rakhine alphabets and civilisation were derived from Bagan. Wethali Kyauk Hlaykha was built by the King Maha Taing Candra who was the son of the King Surya Kaytu of third Dhanyawady's 25th in line and last king. So their religious practise will be accepted as Theravada Buddhism without any doubt. The most important fact is that the date of the King Surya Kula's ascension to the throne was 27. AD. The lapse of time between the first King Canda Surya and the last King was 569 years apart. Most of the European scholars confused in dealing with dates and they recorded the King Canda Surya's ascension of the throne was dated as 146. AD

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